

PRACTICAL HINTS



COMMON-SENSE IN THE LAUNDRY.—In the last number of the JOURNAL Miss Lord in her paper on typhoid fever has given a procedure for the care of soiled clothing to which the writer takes exception. To soak in a disinfectant and then to boil *before* washing results in staining and ruining sheets and all linen supplies, not only making such clothing obnoxious to patients, but causing many pieces to be discarded before they are worn out.

To every hospital matron *staining* is a heart-breaking problem. To secure, perhaps with great difficulty, a quantity of new sheets, to have had them made extra long and extra wide, that they may not pull up at the bottom or work out at the sides, and then after the first washing, to have them come back to the linen-room with a variety of stains is a most discouraging experience, but under the usual method that Miss Lord has endorsed of soaking in a disinfectant and boiling before washing staining will be the invariable result.

There is but one way to wash clothes, and that is the plain, old-fashioned, household method of soaking in cold water, washing in hot soapsuds, boiling, rinsing, and then bluing.

Boiling is our one sure method of disinfection. Chemical disinfectants are unnecessary even in a hospital. "Sours" and "bleaches" and every kind of chemical agent should be abolished. Abundance of water, adequate facilities for boiling, with a good quality of laundry soap into which may be boiled a very small quantity of washing-soda if the water is very hard, are the only agents necessary, provided the laundry is under the supervision of a woman of sufficient intelligence to appreciate the necessity for extreme care under certain conditions.

Staining is caused by the coagulation of the albumin in blood or discharges, which becomes entangled in the meshes of the fabric both by chemical agents and the process of boiling.

To avoid staining, discharges containing albumin must be removed from the fabric without coagulation. The process of "washing" which I give is from my own personal experience in two laundries, where staining of clothing was the rare exception rather than the habitual rule, and which was always the result of disobedience on the part of someone.

Clothing from typhoid patients and from a small contagious department was handled in the one general laundry, and during a period covering more than ten years not one case of contagious disease developed among the laundry workers. Adjoining the laundry proper always should be a room, preferably small, for the handling of soiled or infected linen; and by linen I mean all of the ordinary supplies, sheets, pillow-cases, night-clothing, etc.

The room which I have in mind was a very crude affair with a cement floor and sides, the floor sloping to a central sewer trap, with cold water brought into the side of the room by a pipe, to which a stout rubber hose was attached. The first step in the process was the careful classification of the clothing in the wards, only such articles being sent to this room as was absolutely necessary, the discharges, if any, not having been permitted to become dry. This

clothing was dropped in bundles into tubs of cold water and left to lie there until the laundry woman, whose business it was to look after this work, was ready to attend to it. This she did dressed in rubber boots, with skirts well turned up and a large rubber apron. The bundles were opened wet, handled wet, and if discharges were adherent, the force of the cold water from the hose quickly removed all solid matter. Specially soiled clothing was lifted with a stick. The idea implied here is that germs do not rise from a wet surface, neither is their development rapid in cold water, coagulation of albumin is prevented, and after being treated in this way infected clothing may be handled with impunity.

From this room this clothing was taken immediately to the general laundry-room, washed by the usual process in the ordinary steam washers, in hot water and soap, and in a second water boiled thoroughly under pressure of steam for half an hour. Then followed the ordinary rinsing, bluing, wringing, and drying, and this clothing was as white and free from odors and stains as that of the ordinary "clean" wash.

The weak point in my process is that the infected water in which the clothing has been soaked goes into the sewer without disinfection, but where city sewerage is properly taken care of I do not consider this method a menace to the community. But even if the hospital, as a matter of public precaution, should be at the expense of boiling the water in which the clothing has been soaked, I believe that from the stand-point of economy the cost would be less in comparison with the destruction and defacing of valuable property which is caused by the use of chemical agents and preliminary boiling. Nothing is more offensive than to get into a strange bed that smells of carbolic acid, and I contend that such odors are as unnecessary in a hospital as they are in a private house, and also that hospital clothing can be white and free from stains provided the person in charge of the laundry is intelligent, conscientious, and painstaking, but for such service the hospital must expect to give adequate compensation.

WASHERWOMAN.

LEFT to herself in a great measure and to her own resources, seldom seeing a doctor, often having no one to advise her, the district nurse must of necessity have a basis of good hospital training, and, in addition, must be a woman of high principle, tact, refinement of feeling, and must possess in no small degree sympathy with the poor people, together with a good share of inventive genius.

It is wonderful what can be *done without* on occasion; equally wonderful is it how well one can *make shift* with the materials at hand when necessary.

Called to a patient suffering from bronchitis or any affection for the relief of which the doctor has ordered steam-kettle and tent, we look round at the "nakedness of the land," and long for the apparatus all complete as we had it in hospital. Our longings, however, are vain, and, thrown back on limited resources, we inspect what the house contains or the neighbors can provide, in the way of clothes-horse for frame, and such counterpanes, shawls, or curtains as can be spared for draping the said frame, and with the supplementary aid of hammer and tacks, or string judiciously slung on to existing hooks and nails, we soon have the patient in a very satisfactory tent, with the steam puffing gayly through a long tube of brown paper attached to the spout of an ordinary kettle.

This last is, of course, a temporary arrangement until we can lend a bronchitis-kettle from the home, or until a neighboring tinsmith can fix a long tube

on to the lid of an ordinary saucepan, an arrangement which really answers the purpose admirably.

Nor is the bronchitis-kettle the only use to which brown paper can be put. Passing by its usefulness when the supply of poultice-rags falls short, it makes, when placed under the draw-sheet, a capital temporary protection to the bed of a patient found to be suffering from incontinence of urine, etc., also a protection to the patient from the evil consequences arising from an already damp bed; and one old lady had so proved by experience the value of brown paper as a non-conductor of heat that she could not be persuaded to part with her brown-paper blankets.

One deep-rooted prejudice—that against fresh air in a sick-room—has to be fought persistently by every district nurse, and how to ventilate a room, at the same time avoiding draughts, is a matter which calls for the exercise of considerable tact and skill. It seems sometimes that architects and builders conspire to hamper and hinder the efforts of the district nurse in this direction by their illogical arrangement of windows and doors and their sublime indifference to comfort and convenience. We frequently find it impossible to put the bed out of a draught, and the useful clothes-horse, with its nondescript draperies, has to be pressed into the service, or, failing that, the draperies have to be held in the position required by a string stretching from one end of the room to the other. When a patient is very sensitive to cold air or averse to it, a capital Hinckes-Bird ventilator may be improvised by opening the window, laying a thick roll of newspapers the exact width of the window on the bottom sill, and shutting the window down on to it. By this means the air enters the room in an upward direction at the opening between the top and bottom sash, and no draught is felt. Where I have not been able to get newspapers, I have used a sheet, a rug, a coat, or, in fact, any article of wearing apparel not in immediate use.

Operations in the district are performed under difficulties, and considerable time has often to be expended before the room can be got into anything like suitable order. The cases, however, do remarkably well, in spite of the fact that the operating-table may be made up of two pieces of furniture never intended to be put to such a use, that the sutures repose in a soap-dish and the instruments in a pie-dish, that the lotions are mixed in a milk-bowl or a soup-tureen, and the charger or receiver in a meat-dish. Nor is the patient more likely to suffer from collapse after the anæsthetic because he is put back into a bed warmed with oven-shelves or flat-irons or “pop” bottles.

Time and space forbid, or this “Chat on Makeshifts” could be prolonged indefinitely, recalling instances where we have been glad to utilize a bonnet-box as a cradle for an injured limb, or, failing that, a child’s hoop chopped in two pieces, the severed ends resting on the bed and kept in position by a piece of wood nailed on the top to form a connecting and supporting bar; where we have manufactured quite a useful bed-table out of an orange-box; where a chair, properly placed and packed with pillows or their equivalents, or a mangle-board, has served as an excellent bed-rest; where a roller-towel looped on to the rail at the foot of the bed has been of immense comfort as a pulley; where we have been glad to use teapots as feeders, oatmeal to eke out a scanty supply of linseed-meal for poultices, and (whisper it softly) have taken the ragged apron off a drunken wife for want of better material on which to spread the poultice when mixed. For towels we are given anything, from a sheet to a woollen vest.—“*A Chat on Makeshifts*,” by F. E. W., in *League News*.